

The Grand Opening!

The luck of the numbers was on the Sault Tribe's side with Vegas Kewadin's Friday the 13th Grand Opening in November, 1935.

The new millionaire party night gaming facility was crowded all that December afternoon with invited dignitaries from many parts of Michigan.

Tribal chairpersons from every Michigan Indian tribe save one mingled with state's key commissioners and welcoming red coats. Tribal program directors and members of the Board of Directors were the hosts for this newest tribal economic development project's opening.

Most of the facility's 129 employees were there, confirming the project's employment power. The point was not lost on the various television stations present who several times had all the white-shirted and black-panted dealers form a long queue to parade past the cameras.

There was also the traditional ribbon-cutting ceremony introduced by tribal chairman Joe Lumsden. Lumsden high-lighted the event by presenting a painting by famed Canadian Indian artist Norval Morrisseau to the facility for everyone to enjoy.

Following the opening ceremonies, a buffet lunch was served.

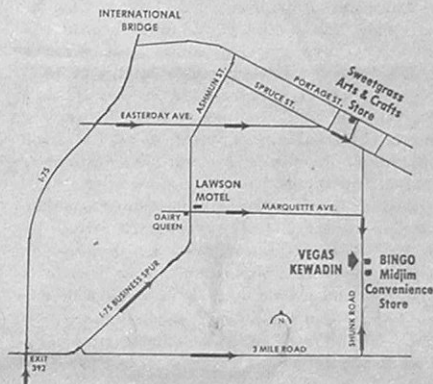


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Sault Ste. Marie, Michigan
2151 Shunk Road



Food, Fun and Gaming!

The half-million dollar Vegas Kewadin is an imposing all-brick windowless building. Parking is handled by uniformed security personnel who are also conspicuous indoors. Inside the double oak doors flanked by stained glass panels is an area with several small tables for those who want light food and cocktails or simply to people-watch. A long solid oak bar parallels the far wall. Off this area are offices, a coat-check room and television monitoring room - off-limits to all but security personnel. This room contains a solid wall of TV screens that continually monitor the gaming area and can cover several tables or zoom in on one hand.

To the right and down a few steps is the gaming area, always surprisingly quiet as players are intent upon their game. Blackjack is the predominant game. There are 36 tables that are crowded many nights of the week. To the side is a money wheel. There are also four poker tables and pull tabs may be purchased.

Blackjack dealers are trained at the facility. Nattily dressed in black and white, the dealers are professional, carefully following the rules of the game, explaining the rules to beginners and wishing well to the lucky - 'Good luck on your ace ma'am.





All photo's in Vegas Kewadin insert by Leslie Eger and Barb Tazelaar.

It's Friday night in the Land of Hiawatha. Business at Vegas Kewadin, the year-old gambling casino owned by the Sault Ste. Marie Tribe of Chippewa Indians, is down to about a thousand players a weekend, off from the summer peak when crowds streamed through the doors starting at noon. But by 7 p.m. (the house is closed to the public at 6 p.m. and the gambling chip is returned) and \$1 mixed drinks. By 9 p.m. the house is full.

Many of the customers are Canadian from the other Sault Ste. Marie across the International Bridge, a city of over 100,000 - five times bigger than its Michigan counterpart. At Vegas Kewadin, Canadian money is accepted at par.

For the house blackjack is the big game.

Players like it because the odds are preset by the cards, says Bernard Bouschor, casino manager and executive director of the tribe. The house has the same 60-40 advantage it has in black jack games all over the world.

We cut the cards less frequently than they do in Vegas, he says, by way of an incentive to the counters. But it is unlikely the high

A motion for a summary judgment will be heard in February. If the case is not resolved, it will go to trial next October. Four other tribes in the state that host gambling on federal reservations have also been named in the suit.

To date, says Bouschor, the casino has retired half the debt on the casino building and summer operation the tribe had a payroll of \$60, making it the largest employer in Michigan's eastern Upper Peninsula.

Bernard Bouschor's family has lived at the Soo for as long as anyone can remember. The Chippewa are known to have roamed the Lake Superior lands for more than 4,000 years, and even in nomadic times the Soo was a settled fishing village because of the rapids. The water never froze where Lake Superior plummeted 20 feet into Lake Huron, yielding a year-round food supply.

Fr. Jaques Marquette, the French explorer-missionary, established his first mission at the



Bernard Bouschor

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rollers will overrun Vegas Kewadin. The house limit is \$1,500 in winnings, although, according to Bouschor it has been hit several times.

Deft dealers and wary pit bosses, slick in their evening shirts and bow ties, are for the most part local tribal people.

The first crew was trained by a teacher from the Bay Mills Community College. Bouschor explains. He went to a dealer's school in Vegas and then taught at the casino. Since then we have adopted Vegas procedures - there are set ways of doing everything, including emptying a cash drawer in front of a camera - and we train the employees ourselves.

Casino work, says Bouschor is labor intensive - late hours, heavy concentration. It has led to a high turnover in employees, although the staff is beginning to stabilize.

We've had people who never worked before who just couldn't handle it. But there are others who are real success stories. Now they can work anywhere.

Currently the staff is about 75 percent Chippewa. The rest are non-Indian.

We work with our people, help them adapt, says Bouschor, but this is a business. If they don't work out, they're gone.

We have to be competitive. The tribe has to have an economic base to survive.

The Sault Chippewa Tribe put down a borrowed million dollars and spun the wheel of fortune.

The wheel will stop in February, or perhaps next October. With a little luck, the tribe could come out a big winner.

Or lose the pot of gold.

The Chippewa took a gamble when they built Vegas Kewadin - Vegas of the North - a million dollar gaming casino on their Indian reservation within the city limits of Sault Ste. Marie. The casino opened in November 1985, the same day the federal government filed a civil suit to close it.



(Above) Tribal chairmen from four of the five tribes helped celebrate the grand opening of the Sault Tribe's biggest economic venture - Vegas Kewadin! From left they are: Joseph Lumsden, Sault Tribe; Arnold Sowmick, Saginaw Chippewa Tribe; Wade Teeple, Bay Mills, and Theodore Wandashega, Hannahville. (Right) Bonnie McKerchie is assistant manager of the casino.

